

Standing for Freedom

By Rep. Mike Pence

Today, the democratic government in Honduras, with the overwhelming support of its people, is taking a stand for freedom. Unfortunately, the United States, under the leadership of President Obama, is using its power to undermine it.

On June 28, former Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was arrested and deported for illegally attempting to amend the Honduran constitution in order to remain in power. Article 239 of the Honduran constitution stipulates that presidents may only serve one term and anyone who seeks to change this provision must immediately be discharged of his duties. Zelaya's removal was ordered under the legitimate authority of the Honduran Supreme Court and it was overwhelmingly supported by the democratically-elected Congress, including Zelaya's own party. A constitutional succession took place with Roberto Micheletti, the head of the Congress, serving as interim President until the next election in November.

The response from the Obama Administration and the international community is shocking. This constitutional change in power has been condemned as a "coup" by the U.S. State Department. Going even further, Secretary Clinton has stated that the United States will not accept the results of the next election in Honduras unless Zelaya is returned to power. This is contrary to both our values and our interests in the region. Zelaya cannot run again and it was his attempt to illegally change the Honduran constitution that led to his ouster.

Essentially, the United States position is requiring the Honduran government to violate their own constitution. When members of the Honduran government were invited to the U.S. to explain their position to the U.S. Congress, their visas were revoked and they were not permitted to enter the United States. The U.S. State Department has also cut off non-humanitarian aid to Honduras, one of the poorest countries in Latin America.

Thugs attempting to undermine constitutional authority to extend their stay in power are not a new phenomenon in the Western Hemisphere. But in Honduras, the people themselves are not

permitting it. What is alarming is that the United States President and Secretary of State have sided with Chavez on this issue, even though every major Honduran institution -- its Congress, the Catholic Church, and the country's human rights organizations -- have sided with the interim government in its handling of the situation.

Former President Zelaya recently snuck back into Honduras stirring up turmoil. Meanwhile, the United Nations has cut off critical support for the Honduran presidential election, saying the conditions do not exist for a credible election, even though the election process began long before the current crisis.

The United States should be actively supporting free and transparent elections rather than threatening to undermine them. The Honduran people deserve our support. They are not only standing up for freedom, rule of law, and democratic institutions, but they are doing this alone. The American people stand on the side of freedom, and their government should do no different.